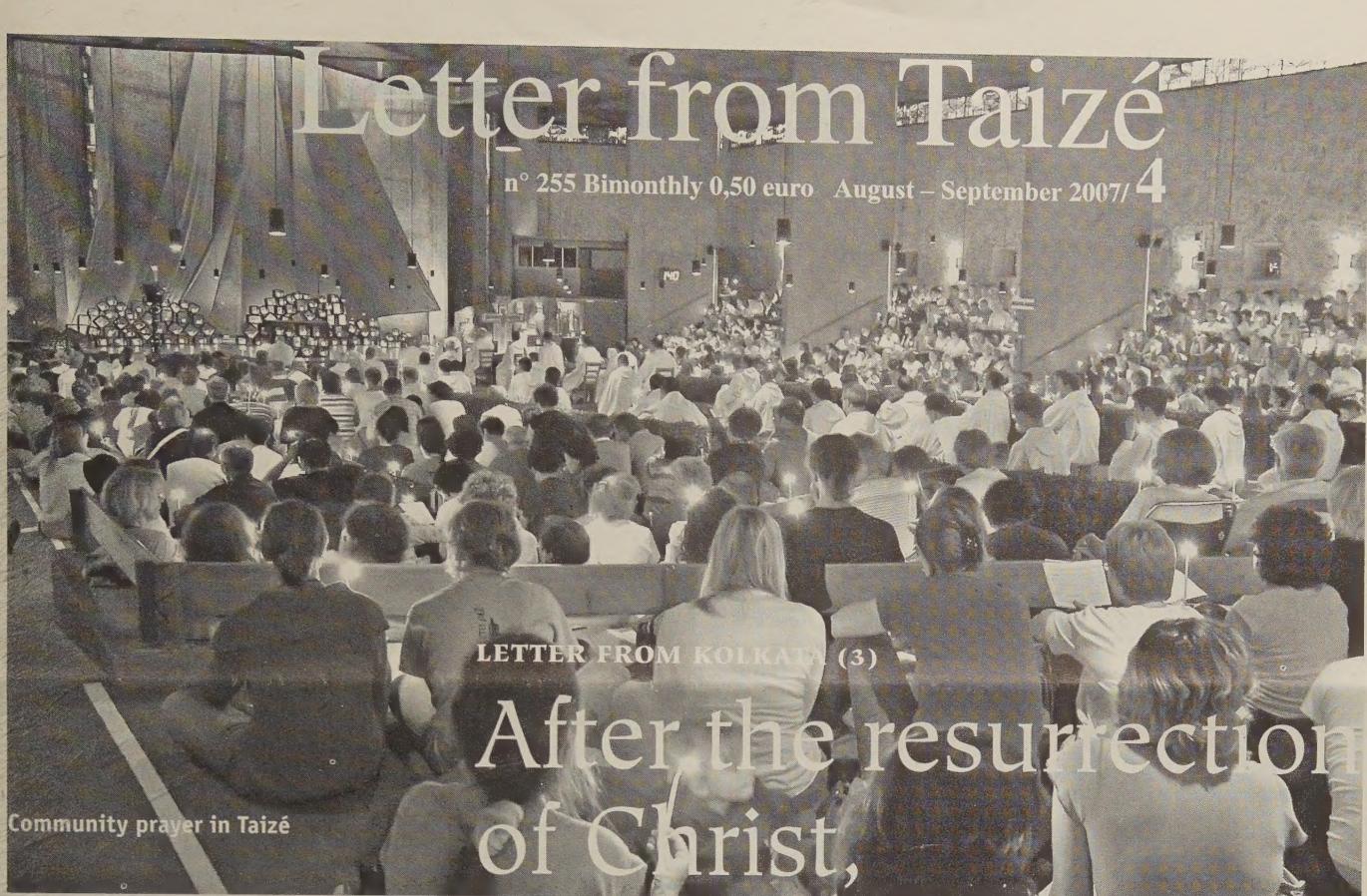


Letter from Taizé

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Community prayer in Taizé

LETTER FROM KOLKATA (3)

After the resurrection of Christ, our humanity is no longer fragmented

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Throughout the year 2007, the *Letter from Taizé* will continue the reflection begun by Brother Alois in his *Letter from Kolkata*.

The first pages will treat each part of the *Letter from Kolkata* successively, starting from three questions:

What experiences of Church does this part of the Letter reflect?

How was it put into practice during the meetings in Taizé or during recent stages of the pilgrimage of trust?

What inspiration does it offer for the future?

On page 3, the portrait of a witness to faith mentioned in the *Letter from Kolkata* enables us to go further with an inner search.

Community prayer in Taizé

Bangkok

Choosing to love, choosing hope

A brother returns from a journey to Southeast Asia:

"Just before taking the plane back, we had a prayer in a poor district of Bangkok. That prayer is part of a series of initiatives aiming to prepare the November evening in Bangkok Cathedral in which Brother Alois will take part.

Klong Toei is the district where the 'Home of Praise' is located, a project of the tiny Lutheran parish nearby. Under the arches and the pillars that support one of the many superhighways of Bangkok, there is a little wooden house. A day-care center and a kindergarten for families in the neighborhood during the day, in the evening it becomes a learning center for young people and adults. Many children are educated by their grandmothers, since their parents are in prison or are addicted to drugs. The staff is half Thai and half from the Scandinavian Lutheran mission.

"For the prayer Oey, a young woman who spent three months in Taizé last

year, has arranged a room, placing the cross and the icon of friendship there, with some flowers. A keyboard made its appearance, quickly followed by children, assistants and a few young people who had come to the Kolkata meeting or to Taizé. The prayer began: a blessed, peaceful moment, with people of all ages and different races and languages."

Taizé

In prayer, we place ourselves and those entrusted to us before the benevolent eyes of God. God welcomes us as we are, with what is good, but also with our inner contradictions and even our faults. The Gospel assures us that our weaknesses can become a doorway through which the Holy Spirit enters our life.

In Taizé, among the different ways of taking part in life on the hill, it is possible to spend a week in silence. How can we discover the call Christ addresses to

us today? How can we find the energy to set out in his steps? Most of those who prepare for a retreat of this kind are not very used to keeping silence for several days in a row. Many hesitate at first, unsure if they can "keep quiet for a week." And yet how many of them are astonished to see, after a day or two, that silence is not so much a place of suffering or isolation but rather a space where an authentic communion with God and others can be prepared. While taking part in the community prayers, the retreatants stay apart from the others in two houses set aside for them. Each morning a bible meditation is given by a brother or a sister. The rest of the day is spent alone, in silence, with the possibility of a personal conversation with a brother or a sister. Rachid describes his week, "Keeping silence for a week does not mean not speaking. Rather, it means speaking even more, speaking until all our words are exhausted. And when there is nothing more to say you choose to listen. But listen to what? Listen to God, who speaks to us. He speaks to us as I am speaking to you."

Stockholm

Thirty years ago, Brother Roger wrote in Calcutta: "Prayer is a source of loving for you. In total selflessness, abandon yourself, body and spirit. Every day go deeply into a few lines of the Scriptures, to be brought face to face with Another, with the Risen Lord. In silence, let a living word of Christ be born in you, then put it into practice right away."

The Stockholm meeting brought together several hundred young people from May 3-6, 2007. Most of them came from the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, from Poland and Croatia. One of the brothers present describes part of the meeting:

"With the fragrance of hawthorn blossom and lilac strong in the air as we walked through the churchyard, evening prayer began in Katarina Church at 8pm. Even more than yesterday evening, there was a density in the prayer which could only come from the intense desire of those participating to seek God. The songs rang around the huge dome of the church. The time of silence was utterly still. In his meditation, Brother Alois said: 'I would like to say a few more words to the young people among you. Today it is above all you who are the ones able to communicate trust in God to those around you, doing it by the life you live as well as by a few words. Do not let doubts or the impression that you lack preparation or knowledge hold you

back. All this is part of a life in the footsteps of Christ.' And as we gathered to pray around the cross, you could sense something of the longing of so many people to take another step in their following of Christ."

Greece

Scattered across the world, Christians can sustain hope for all by rooting their lives in this amazing news: after the resurrection of Christ, our humanity is no longer fragmented.

A brother writes after returning from a visit to Greece:

"My visits took place during Easter-tide when the joy of the resurrection is fully present. People greet one another with the words: 'Christ is risen – He is risen indeed!' and in the prayers this song is often sung: 'Christ is risen from the dead, by dying he destroyed death, and he gave life to those in the tomb.' Trust in the resurrection gives a spontaneity and a freedom to which the Greeks are very attached. When he received me, the archbishop of Neapolis, in the western suburbs of Thessalonica, said, 'God is a God of surprises.'

"At Volos, while the diocesan staff and I were getting ready to see the archbishop in his study, all of a sudden he came to see us, sitting down with no formality. We drank coffee, talked together, made plans, and felt very much at home.

"The following Sunday I was in Piraeus, where I attended the liturgy with some friends. When their little girl, four years old, went to receive communion with her parents, she also took a piece of blessed bread to bring it to the brother who had come from so far away. It was a beautiful sign that the Risen Christ brings us together to make us all into God's family."

Bangladesh

Already the Christians of the first generation, a tiny minority in the world, had this conviction: Christ destroyed the wall of separation between peoples by giving his life on the cross. (See Ephesians 2:14-16.)

For five years now, one of the Taizé brothers living in Bangladesh goes each week to the prison of the town to visit a group of Christian convicts: "Surprisingly, they let us enter with two large icons that we brought, wrapped in cloth:

an icon of the resurrection and the icon of friendship, the same one we received last October during the Kolkata meeting. In that room surrounded by the prison walls, we had a long and very beautiful prayer together. The Bangladeshis are always happy to sing. To these men who have been imprisoned for such a long time, the stories of Easter speak to their hearts: we sing praises to Christ the Savior, who destroys our chains and brings forgiveness and liberation... At the end of the prayer we shared our joy with the guards and the police officers present all around us, as well as with the other prisoners who were watching us from the inner courtyard of the prison through the small barred window of the room. We offered everyone a small piece of cake, some sweets and the sugared yoghurt we had brought. Then, while singing the Easter Alleluia again, we passed out small lit candles to all of those present in the room. And even the guards and the police officers, to their astonishment, received one!"

Some questions to continue, alone or in a group, a reflection on the third part of the *Letter from Kolkata*:

– Placing ourselves before the benevolent eyes of God: in my rhythm of life, it is possible to find regular times to place myself before God's eyes? Do these times of prayer influence the way I see myself?

– "Trust in the resurrection gives a spontaneity and a freedom to which the Greeks are very attached." In the way we live as Christians in the midst of others, how can we rediscover that spontaneity and that freedom, especially in our contacts with non-believers?

– Do I know about things being done in my situation that attempt to "destroy the wall of separation between peoples" and show that "humanity is no longer fragmented"? Can I take part in these more actively?

The Relevance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young pastor who symbolized the German resistance against Nazism, is counted among those who can support us on our road of faith. In the darkest hours of the twentieth century, he gave his life to the point of martyrdom. In prison he wrote these words we sing in Taizé: "God, let my thoughts be gathered to you. With you there is light, you do not forget me. With you there is help, with you there is patience. I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me."

What is touching about Bonhoeffer is how he resembles the Church fathers, the Christian thinkers of the first centuries. The Church fathers did their work while searching for a unity of life. They were able to reflect intellectually in an extremely profound way, but at the same time they prayed a lot and were fully integrated into the life of the Church of their time. That is found in Bonhoeffer. Intellectually he was almost too talented. But at the same time he was a man who prayed a great deal. He meditated on Scripture every day, until the end of his life. He understood it, as Gregory the Great once said, as a letter from God addressed to him. Although he came from a family where the men – his father, his brothers – were practically agnostics, and although his Church, the German Protestant Church, disappointed him a lot in the Nazi period and he suffered from this, he lived fully as a member of the Church.

I would like to mention three of his writings:

His doctoral thesis, *Sanctorum Communio*, has something exceptional for the time. A young student, 21 years old, writes a dogmatic reflection on the sociology of the Church, starting from Christ. Reflecting, starting from Christ, on what the Church should be seems incongruous. Much more than an institution, the Church for him is Christ existing in the form of the Church. Christ is not a little bit present through the Church; no, he exists for us today in the form of the Church. This is utterly faithful to Saint Paul. It is this Christ who has taken our fate upon himself, who has taken our place. This way Christ acted remains the fundamental law of the Church: taking the place of those who have been excluded, of those who are outside, as Jesus did during his ministry and already at the time of his baptism. It is striking to see how this book speaks of intercession: it is like the blood that circulates in the Body of Christ. To express this, Bonhoeffer depends on Orthodox theologians.

He also speaks of confession, which was practically unheard of in the Protestant Churches. Imagine that: a young man of 21 years affirms that it is possible for a minister of the Church to say to us, "Your sins are forgiven," and affirms that this is part of the essence of the Church. How new this was in its context!

The second writing is a book he wrote when he was called to become the director of a seminary for theology students who were considering a ministry in the Confessing Church, men who had to prepare themselves for a very hard life. Almost all of them had to deal with the Gestapo; some were thrown into prison. In German the title is very short: *Nachfolge*, "following" (in English, *The Cost of Discipleship*). That tells all about the book. How can we take seriously what Jesus expressed; how can we not set it aside as if the words were for other times? The book says how: *following* has no content. We would have preferred Jesus to have a program. But no! In following him, everything depends on our relationship with him: he goes ahead and we follow.

Following, for Bonhoeffer, means recognizing that if Jesus truly is what he says about himself, then he has a claim on everything in our life. He is the "mediator". No human relationship can take prevalence over him. Bonhoeffer quotes Christ's words calling us to leave parents, family, possessions. That frightens us a bit today, and some people criticized that aspect of the book: does not Bonhoeffer present an image of Christ that is too authoritarian? We read in the Gospel, however, how astonished people were at the authority with which Jesus taught and cast out evil spirits. There is an authority in Jesus. Yet he speaks of himself, differently from the Pharisees, as *gentle and humble of heart*, in other words: *someone who was tried himself and who is beneath us*. That is how he always presented himself, and true authority is found behind this humility.

The whole book is organized in that way: listen with faith and put it into practice. If we listen with faith, if we realize that Christ is the one speaking, we cannot not put into practice what he says. If faith stopped before being put into practice, then it would no longer be faith. It would set a limit to the Christ that we listened to. Of course, in Bonhoeffer's writing that can seem a bit too strong, but does not the Church need such listening again and again? A simple listening. A direct, immediate listening, that

believes it is possible to live what Christ asks.

The third writing is the famous *Letters and Papers from Prison*. In a world where he perceives that God is no longer recognized, in a world without God, Bonhoeffer asks the question: how are we going to speak of Him? Will we try to create enclaves of Christian culture, turning to the past with a certain nostalgia? Will we try to foster religious needs in people who apparently no longer have any? Today it can be said that there is a revival of interest in religion, but often it is only to give a religious veneer to life. It would be dishonest on our part to create explicitly a situation in which people would need God.

How then can we speak of Christ today? Bonhoeffer answers: by our life. It is impressive to see how he describes the future to his godson: "The days are coming when it may be impossible to speak openly, but we will pray, we will do what is right, and God's time will come." Bonhoeffer believed that the language we need will be given to us by life. We can all feel today, even with respect to those who are closest to us, a great difficulty in speaking about redemption by Christ, about life after death or, still more, about the Trinity. All that is so far away for people who, in some sense, no longer need God. How can we have the confidence that if we live lives rooted in God, the language will be given to us? It will not be given if we make the Gospel accessible by diminishing it. No, the language will be given if we truly live it.

In his letters, as in the book on discipleship, everything ends in a way that is almost mystical. He would not have wanted us to say that, but when it is a question of being with God without God, one's thoughts turn to Saint John of the Cross, or to Saint Theresa of Lisieux in that difficult period she went through at the end of her life. That is what Bonhoeffer wanted: to stay with God without God. To dare to remain beside him when he is refused, rejected. That gives a certain gravity to all he wrote. And yet it is good to know that he was optimistic. His vision of the future has something liberating for Christians. He trusted; the word trust appears so often in his letters from prison.

In prison, Bonhoeffer would have liked to have written a commentary on Psalm 119, but he only got to the third stanza. In that Psalm there is a verse that sums up Bonhoeffer's life: *You are close, Lord; all that you ordain is truth*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived from the assurance that Christ is truly close, in every situation, even the most extreme ones. *You are close, Lord; all that you ordain is truth*. We can believe that what you ordain is not only true, but worthy of our entire trust.

By Brother François of Taizé

The Eagles and the Cedar

As in today's world, at the time of the great prophets of the Bible the political situation was complex and often bewildering. The tiny nation of Israel, forced to make its way amidst the great powers of this world, was constantly beset by the temptation to make alliances with those powers, hoping in that way to defend themselves by pitting one against the other. The prophets, for their part, emphasized trust in God, the true Lord of history. It is easy to understand that for the "realists", such an attitude was not even worth taking seriously.

But where is true realism found? Here, the prophet Ezekiel criticizes the attempt of the leaders of his people to find salvation by this game of alliances. He describes Babylon and Egypt as two great eagles fighting over a cedar, then a grapevine, which at the end is reduced to nothing. For Ezekiel it is obvious that all attempts to find a way out by making deals with the powerful of this world is doomed to failure from the start.

In the midst of this confusion, a different hope arises. Unexpectedly, God himself will take things in hand. God will take a small remnant of the nation ("a tender sprig") and bring it back to its homeland, where it will take root. This tiny twig will turn into a magnificent tree, with the result that all the birds in the sky come to nest in its branches. In this way people will realize that God, and God alone, holds in his hands the keys to human history, that he is able to do wonders starting from almost nothing, whereas human power and greatness are often nothing but empty appearance.

This allegory of Ezekiel's contains in a nutshell the divine logic that will manifest itself fully at the coming of Christ. And Jesus will use similar examples to explain the coming of God's Reign in his person (see Mark 4:30-32).

- Can I think of examples where God brings to nothing that plans of the powerful of this world?
- What does it mean to be realistic? Is the conviction that God is hidden behind the course of world events justified?
- What consequences would this conviction have for my way of living and acting?

One Human Family

In the course of history, the Jewish people were very attentive to their distinctive identity as the People of the Covenant. In different areas of life, they often emphasized their differences with respect to surrounding nations and religions, in order to keep their identity as the chosen people and be a sign for the world. This attitude sometimes exposed them to the incomprehension and even the hostility of others.

At the beginning of the history of the Church, Saint Paul declared that, because of Christ, the wall that separates peoples no longer existed. When abused and mistreated, Christ did not threaten anyone (1 Peter 2:23). By showing his love to the point of dying on a cross, "he put hatred to death" (v.16). Christ himself brought peace by reconciling all human beings—Jews and pagans—to God and, as a result, with one another. In this way, beyond all forms of separation and hatred, a new humanity is born in the body of Christ.

Now according to Saint Paul this Body is the Church, the community of those who walk in the steps of Christ. The apostles and prophets (v.20) are the first witnesses of Christ, upon whom this "house of God" is established. Each believer, whatever his or her background, is a full member of it. When Christians live in unity and love, the Church grows as a construction built by God, a visible sign of the divine presence in the world.

This text opens up immense perspectives. The reality of a single human family is a gift of God in faith. Beyond cultural and economic differences, despite the heavy burdens of history, Christians can and should witness to this unity in a world which is still torn apart.

- What attitude, actions and concrete initiatives help us to go beyond the barriers of separation that exist in and around us?
- "Christ is our peace." What do these words of Saint Paul mean for me today?
- What helps our local Church or prayer group to grow as a place of communion in a society that is often heterogeneous and multicultural? What can I do to foster this process?

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it. (Ezekiel 17:22-24 NIV)

Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Ephesians 2:14-22 NIV)

God of compassion, you suffer with those who are undergoing trials and you always welcome whoever brings their own burdens to you.

Jesus said: When you have a dinner, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, and you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you.

Jesus said: Give to those in need. Provide for yourselves a treasure that will not fail. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

4 Fri Jesus said: Bear each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

5 Wed Jesus said: When you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, and your Father in heaven will forgive your sins.

6 Thu Jesus said: If anyone wants to follow me, let them renounce themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Jn 13:31-35

7 Fri Jesus said: Love one another just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

8 Sat Paul writes: In all things God works for the good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

1 Sat Paul writes: I am confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the day of Christ Jesus comes.

22 Sat Paul writes: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

29 Sat Paul writes: Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. So then, my dear brothers and friends, stand firm in the Lord.

30 Sun Paul writes to Timothy: Fight the good fight of faith and win the eternal life to which you were called.

SEPTEMBER

DAILY READINGS

17 Mon Jesus said to his disciples: In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

18 Tue Paul writes: We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; we see no way out, but we never despair. We always carry in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed there too.

19 Wed Jesus and his disciples went to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. From every town, people hurried to the place and reached it before them. Seeing the large crowd, Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

13 Thu Jesus said: I am the true vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

14 Fri All the commandments can be summed up in this: Love your neighbour as yourself.

20 Thu Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, to run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.

21 Fri St MATTHEW With all humility, gentleness and patience, bear with one another in love. Take every care to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace.

22 Sat Paul writes: Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. So then, my dear brothers and friends, stand firm in the Lord.

23 Sun Jesus said: No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

24 Mon Jesus said: I am not here on my own, but the one who sent me is true. I know him because I am from him and he sent me.

25 Tue Be generous, for you know the generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ who became poor for your sake.

26 Wed Jesus said: Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

27 Thu Paul explained his ministry, saying: We do not want to be masters of your faith, but fellow workers with you for your joy.

28 Fri Jesus said to his disciples: Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say: "I am going away and I will return to you." If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

OCTOBER

DAILY READINGS

Holy Spirit, you come to kindle a glimmer of light within us. Even if it is quite dim, it is enough to sustain the desire for God in our hearts.

14 Sun ^{Lk 17:11-19} To the Samaritan who returned to thank Jesus for healing him, Jesus said: Rise and go. Your faith has saved you.

7 Sun Paul writes to Timothy: I remind you now to fan into a flame the gift God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self-control.

8 Mon ^{Ps 130} My soul is waiting for the Lord, I rely on his promise; my soul relies on the Lord more than a night-watcher on the coming of dawn.

15 Mon ^{Dt 30:11-14} Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up for us.

16 Tue ^{Ps 4:4} Many keep saying, "Who will give us happiness?" Lord, let the light of your face shine upon us.

17 Wed ^{Mt 23:1-12} Jesus said to his disciples: You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again?

18 Thu ^{Ps 4:4} Jesus said: Watch and pray, so as not to fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but human nature is weak.

19 Fri ^{Mk 14:32-44} Jesus said: Watch and pray, so as not to fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but human nature is weak.

20 Sat ^{Pr 17:5-8} The person who trusts in the Lord is like a tree planted by the water: in a year of drought it is untroubled and never ceases to bear fruit.

21 Sun ^{Lk 18:7-8} Jesus said: Will not God bring about justice for those who cry out to him day and night?

22 Mon ^{Ps 143} I think of all your deeds, Lord, and stretch out my hands to you: my soul is thirsting for you like a parched land.

23 Tue ^{Ps 4:4} Send out your light and your truth, Lord, let them be my guides.

24 Wed ^{Rm 8:5-11} Paul writes: The Spirit seeks life and peace.

25 Thu ^{1 Tm 4:7-10} Paul writes: The point of all our toil and battling is that we have put our trust in the living God, who is the saviour of all people.

26 Fri ^{1 Tm 3:22-26} God's compassion is renewed every morning; his faithfulness is great. It is good to await in silence the salvation of the Lord.

27 Sat ^{Ga 2:15-21} Paul writes: The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

28 Sun ^{Lk 18:9-14} In a parable, Jesus said that the one who prayed saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," went home forgiven.

29 Mon ^{Is 50:4-10} The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue, so that I may know how to comfort the one who is exhausted.

30 Tue ^{2 Co 1:3-7} Praised be God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

31 Wed ^{1 Jn 4:16-21} This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother and sister.

17 Thu ^{Lk 10:1-9} St LUKE Jesus said: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. So pray that the Lord of the harvest may send out workers into his harvest.

18 Fri ^{Is 50:4-9} God awakens my ear every morning to listen as a disciple.

19 Sat ^{Lk 12:22-31} Jesus said: Seek first God's Kingdom, and all other things will be given to you as well.

20 Sun ^{Is 61:10-11} As the earth sends up its shoots and a garden lets its seeds sprout, so God will cause justice and praise to spring up.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taié. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

What does it mean to evangelize?

In these days of marketing, we have learned to mistrust those who promise us good things. In this context, the New Testament verb “to evangelize” can frighten us. We are embarrassed to propose our faith to someone else, as if we were trying to sell something. And we are so deeply concerned to respect others that we do not want to give the impression of imposing our own ideas or to try and convince others. Especially when it is a question of a subject as intimate as trust in God.

But do we really know what the New Testament means by “evangelizing”?

In Greek, the verb is used for the expression “to announce good news”: someone who is “evangelized” is basically someone who has been “made aware, brought up to date.” The verb can be used to announce a birth, an armistice or the inauguration of a new leader. It has no religious meaning in itself. And yet it was that word, almost too commonplace, that Christians used to describe the most precious aspect of their faith: the announcement of Christ’s resurrection. What is interesting is that, gradually, the word lost its complement. People didn’t say “make someone aware of Christ’s resurrection” but simply “evangelize someone.” This was obviously to save time, but that lack of a complement also has a deeper significance.

To proclaim the Good News of the resurrection is not, for Christians, to speak of a doctrine to be learned by heart or a piece of wisdom to meditate on. To evangelize means above all to bear witness to a transformation within a human being: because of the resurrection of Christ, our own resurrection has already begun. By his infinite respect towards those he encountered (visible through the acts of healing we find in the Gospels), by taking the lowest place so that no one would be lower than him (that is the meaning of his baptism), Christ Jesus restored worth and dignity to every person. Still more, Jesus was with us in death, so that we could be close to him in his communion with the Father. By this “admirable exchange” (Easter liturgy), we discover that we are fully accepted by God, fully welcomed by him just as we are. The Christians of the first centuries summed this up by saying, “God became man so that man could become God!”

To evangelize thus does not mean in the first place talking about Jesus to someone but, on a much deeper level, making that person aware of the value he or she has in God’s eyes. Evangelizing means communicating these words of God that rang out five centuries before Christ: “You are precious in my sight, and I love you” (Isaiah 43:4). Since Easter morning, we know that God did not hesitate to give everything so that we would never forget what we are worth.

Can we “evangelize” someone while respecting his or her freedom?

Causing people to realize their worth in God’s eyes is not something optional. Paul even goes as far as saying, “Woe to me if I do not evangelize!” (1 Corinthians 9:16). For him, evangelization is the direct consequence of his attachment to Christ. Through his resurrection, Christ unites us inseparably to God. No one can ever again feel they are excluded from that union. And at the same time, humanity is no longer fragmented: since the resurrection, we belong to one another.

Still, the question remains: how can we communicate that news to people who know nothing of God and seem to expect nothing from God?

First of all, by our personal attachment to Christ. Paul said, “You have clothed yourselves in Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Evangelization calls us to start with ourselves. It is first of all by our life, and not by words, that we witness to the reality of the resurrection: “To know Christ and the power of his resurrection and a sharing in his sufferings, coming to be like him in his death, so that [we] might finally attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). It is by our assurance, by our serene joy in knowing that we have been loved from all eternity, that Christ becomes credible in the eyes of those who do not know him.

There are situations, however, when words are necessary. Peter puts it well: “Always be ready to reply to whoever asks you the reason for the hope which is in you” (1 Peter 3:16). Of course, speaking of an intimate love requires much sensitivity. And sometimes it is hard to find words, especially in situations where faith is brutally called into question. Jesus knew this well, and he said to his disciples, “When you are brought before (...) the authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you need to say” (Luke 12:11-12).

Because Christ clothed himself in our humanity and we have clothed ourselves in Christ, we should never be afraid of not knowing how to speak. In the Christian vocation of not choosing those they love, but of receiving everyone without discrimination, there is a generosity that is touching, and even more, that encloses someone in the life of Christ. In our capacity as servants, we share our garment with those we serve, a bit like Jesus who, when he washed his disciples’ feet, “took off his garments” (John 13:4). It is above all the disinterestedness of our acts that will speak for us; it will authenticate the words we speak.

December 28th 2007 to
January 1st 2008

Preparing for the European Meeting in Geneva

For the trip to Geneva really to be a pilgrimage of trust, it is important to prepare oneself personally and as a group. Here are some ideas for the preparation during the autumn months.

You can meet for a time of prayer together each month (October, November and December). On the Taizé website, you will find suggestions for a prayer using the songs of Taizé, music and a choice of prayers and texts for each month: www.taize.fr "Prayer and song." See also the section "Meeting in Geneva" for practical information.

After the prayer there can be a time of sharing based on these suggestions:

October meeting:
"Leave your country!"

– Find one or two persons who can tell about their experience of the European meeting last year. Was it easy to leave for an unknown country? What struck them about that adventure?

– Read these two Bible passages together:

The Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." (Genesis 12:1-2)

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

– Take time to get to know one another in small groups (8-10 persons): What is my link with the Church; how am I involved in my parish? What am I looking for from the European meeting?

– Then reflect more deeply on the Bible texts with these questions: Is it hard for me to take part in projects when I don't know

very well where I'm heading? What could help me to have the daring of Abraham? Are there things in my way of living, in my life at home that I would like to "leave behind"? Can the meeting in Geneva help me with this?

– Finally: give a responsibility to each person for the rest of the preparation: Who will take care of the next prayer? How can we make contact with other young people in our church or region and invite them to travel with us?

Ask each person to bring for the November meeting one or more photos that best describe what they love about their life (their home, their neighborhood, someone in their family...). These photos can be brought to Geneva to help those who welcome us understand where we come from.

November meeting:
"Leave discouragement behind!"

– Share about the photos in small groups.

– Read this Bible passage together:

The disciples' boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. Early in the morning Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. (Matthew 14:24-32)

– To reflect more deeply: Are there situations in my life where I have the impression I am walking on water, on uncertain ground? How can we face failures without losing the desire to advance?

– In the group leaving for Geneva: Who are those who do not know the other members of the group well? How can we be attentive to them? Who are the youngest? How can they be given a responsibility for the material preparation of the trip?

– To pay for the journey: Are there people who would like to go to Geneva but don't have the means financially? What can we do to support them? Look together for ways of sharing the cost of the trip (selling cakes in front of church after Sunday worship, garage sales, doing errands for neighbors, babysitting...) and create a small solidarity fund.

December meeting: "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35)

– Discovering Geneva: How can we discover more about the people of Switzerland? Those who welcome us will be touched if we know something about their life. Suggest that two or three people look for information on the culture, language and life of the Church in Geneva and present it to the group. You can even invite Swiss people to express what, in their eyes, is distinctive about their nation. You will find lots of information on the internet.

– Reflect on this quote from Saint Paul: "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35). What can I give of myself in Geneva? Would it be possible for me to come to Geneva two days early to help with the welcome?

– Prepare the "festival of nations". The evening of December 31st, after the prayer vigil, in each parish a festival is held during which each country has to present something of its culture. What can we present (song, dance, explanations...)?

– What acts of solidarity can we invent with those who remain home? (Bringing their prayer intentions; sharing our experiences when we return; taking the addresses of people who live alone to send them a message of hope from Geneva in the name of all those gathered together for peace...).

Letter from Taizé

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